

## Graignamanagh

EDWARD HUGHES, S.S.

At the old Abbey of Graigue, Mr. E. Hughes, S.S., read a paper on the Cistercian Order in Ireland and the Foundation at Duiske as it was formerly known. The old Abbey is still used as the Catholic Church, one of the few in Ireland which has survived through the centuries. We viewed a magnificent processional doorway now in the baptistry, which had been discovered some years ago under plaster in a building adjoining the Church also some carved stone crosses which had been brought from outlying districts and re-erected in the church-yard.

Mr. Hughes said that when visiting a monument such as this it is desirable to create if possible an atmosphere which might help one to appreciate and understand something of the era to which it belongs. In a lecture delivered by the Most Rev. Dr. Healy, Archbishop of Tuam, at Maynooth College in 1901, he said :—

“The State of the Irish Church at the end of the 11th Century was very deplorable. This arose first of all from the grave abuses that had grown up during the Danish wars in Ireland when all was blood-shed and confusion. Monasteries were destroyed, churches were burned, clergy and monks were slain. The schools were closed, the books themselves were burned, and a systematic attempt was made to destroy Christianity throughout the island.

“It is singular that the Irish reforms began almost simultaneously both in the North and in the South at the very beginning of the 12th century and in quarters where we should least expect. But it is to St. Malachy the success of the reform is mainly due and the chief instrument which St. Malachy employed was the introduction of the Cistercians.”

Thus because of the friendship between St. Malachy and the great St. Bernard of Clairvaux it was Ireland's privilege to be one of the first outside countries to come under the influence of this great Cistercian, and to him Ireland owes no small share of her ancient glory. This first colony of monks (part Irish) arrived from Clairvaux and proceeded to establish their Mon-

astery at Mellifont, in Co. Louth, in 1142, and so rapid was the progress of the new community that, in the short space of four years Mellifont itself became a mother house, and in all, was the parent of eight such Abbeys, six being established within eleven years. The nearest daughter house to us is, I think, at Baltinglass, which in turn was the parent of Jerpoint just eight miles away.

*DUISKE OR GRAIGNAMANAGH* ..... ..

This picturesque valley appears in the Record under many titles — Brenodowskir, Nova Villa, Adlatharan and others — but the name Duiske or Griagnamanagh has survived, the former being the name of the little river which winds its way from Brandon Hill to where it joins the Barrow just south of the bridge. It was from the little river that the Abbey secured the water required for domestic purposes and sanitation. Graignamanagh derives its name from the Abbey and signifies “The Grange of the Monks”.

Duiske or Graignamanagh was not an Irish foundation, and, although the area was described in the Charters as “a place of horror and vast solitude, a cave of robbers and the lair of those who lie in wait for blood” it did not deter the monks from Stanly, in Wiltshire, who decided to settle here in the early years of the 13th century. The founder was William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, who acquired extensive territory in Leinster.

Although the exact date of the foundation cannot be accurately ascertained, we know that a cemetery was dedicated here on 6th June, 1204, and from then the medieval fame of Duiske may be said to commence. The Abbey buildings followed the usual Cistercian plan and when it is realised that the overall length of the Church is 54 feet longer than Jerpoint and wider across the transept by almost 30 feet with the conventual building likewise proportionately greater, some idea of the extent and immensity of this Abbey can be gauged.

Jerpoint in its glory, is said to have housed 1,300 religious and, when we further consider that to relieve overcrowding here the chapter house and refectory had to be extended and enlarged, it is possible that at one time greater numbers than in Jerpoint dedicated their lives “to the glory of God, the Blessed Mother of Our Lord and Holy Benedict” at Duiske.

*POWER AND WEALTH INCREASED*

As the power influence and wealth of Duiske increased the adjoining Abbey at Kilenny, Goresbridge (daughter of Jerpoint) decreased so much that Kilenny was declared unable to support itself or to dispense hospitality in accordance with the Rules of the Order. It was directed that Kilenny should be transferred to Duiske with whatever property it possessed. Not unnaturally, Jerpoint objected and the dispute between the two Abbeys continued for over 150 years.

Meanwhile the buildings and reconstruction continued, as the architectural features still remaining would indicate. A tower of unusual shape (octagon) was added, and, so that you will get a pen picture of life in a medieval Abbey such as Duiske, I quote again from Most Rev. Dr. Healy :

“There is one essential element in the constitution of the Cistercian Monasteries, which I think ought to commend itself to us all. The Cistercian monks, as a rule, lived by the labour of their own hands. Every member of the community should work —“*Labore est orare*” was their maxim. Work done for the community was in itself a prayer. Their tasks were different—but all had to work, and even the abbot, peer of Parliament though it might be, if he was true to his rule, was expected to work some time in the garden or in the field. It was good for his own health and good for the example it gave the community”.

Irish agriculture, such as it is, owes much to the Cistercians. They reclaimed and manured the land; they raised abundant crops; they made their fields the greenest and most fertile in the whole country. They are still to be seen—those fertile fields — now in the hands of strangers, often times reclaimed from the brake and morass by the unceasing labour of the monks. The Celts were not great agriculturists; they were a pastoral people. The Cistercians were their best teachers in showing how to till the soil extensively and successfully. The Monastery was, by its labour, a self supporting institution, which made the most of all the natural resources at its disposal for the benefit not only of the inmates of the house but of the whole surrounding community.

The monks fed themselves and the poor on the produce of the crops planted, reaped and dressed themselves. They

clothed themselves with the wool of their own flocks, shorn, spun, woven and sewn by themselves. They built their own monasteries and churches for amongst their brethren were architects, masons, carpenters, painters—men in fact, of every craft, who were, as a rule, members of the community. Then all these laboured for God; it was not for money but for God they did their work and hence they did it so thoroughly, so grandly, so beautifully, that their labour in those far-off days still puts to shame even the greatest achievements of our boasted civilisation.

### *MONASTIC SCHOOLS*

Moreover, the Abbey had its own school for the younger members of the community. The youth of the neighbourhood were also admitted to these monastic schools and received such education as they needed. Many of the monks were highly skilled in the medical science of the time and gave the benefit of their advice not only to their own brethren, but to the sick of the neighbourhood, to whom both medicine and medical advice were freely and gratuitously dispensed whenever needed. The technical shops had masters to teach all mechanical arts—and above all horticulture in the garden and agriculture in the fields.

So when you see a monastery like this it commands our respect, not only because it was once the sanctuary of religion, the home of self denying men, but also because it was the school, the dispensary, the hospital and the alms-house for the poor of all the country round about it .

Despite its wealth and prosperity, this apparently peaceful valley situate on the borders of the Pale was oft in turn sanctuary for Saxon and Celt. Separated only by the lordly Barrow the Kavanaghs on one hand and Norman Knights on the other were locked in mortal combat. From such conflicts the Abbey occasionally found it difficult to remain aloof, and that it prospered and survived the turmoil is a tribute to the diplomacy and tact of the Abbey authorities.

Even the tower surmounting the Church itself was once the centrepiece of this inter clan strife when O'Nolan sought refuge there and was besieged. This incident is vividly described by Sir Samuel Ferguson in "The Captive of Killeshin." Despite these difficulties, the monks at Duiske within these hallowed

walls for over 300 years discharged their sacred calling until the rumour of suppression and confiscation in England became a reality in Ireland, and so Duiske, the pride of the Irish Cistercians, was dissolved by Letters Patent dated 6th May, 1536. By co-incidence, the last Abbot was a Kinsman of the Celtic Kavanagh.

Although stripped of its land and valuables, many of the monks who survived the terror returned and re-occupied the buildings. No doubt they were assisted and at times sheltered by the inhabitants of the town which grew up outside the Abbey walls. Abbots continued to be appointed and, as far as was possible in this troubled period, continuity was preserved again no doubt helped if not actively assisted by the closed eye of the Butlers to whom the Abbey land passed under lease from the King in 1541. That such occupation was possible can be seen from the account of the Massacre of Duiske published in 1629 by Philip O'Sullivan Beare as follows:

#### *TWELVE RELIGIOUS DIE FOR FAITH*

“Situating on the river Barrow there is a noble monastery called in Irish Graigue. The robbers go to seize it. As they draw near, twelve religious go out to meet them in ecclesiastical array. But when they were bidden to put off their sacred vestments and to yield to Elizabeth, Queen of England, their superior (he was the prior, for the abbot had died a few days before) answered: that this could not be done if the faith which they had pledged to God to the Virgin Mother, and to St. Bernard, and the christian piety which they professed, were to be kept, and that they would not violate their faith and christian piety. And when the others had added their assent to this decision, they were all slain together.” Their cause for beatification was heard and Decree issued in 1915.

This sad event possibly occurred during the “ownership” by Sir Edward Butler who later became Viscount Galmoy and whose wife, Lady Anne Butler, presented a silver chalice to the Parish of Graig in 1636. This chalice is still in use .

From now on the Story of Duiske is closely allied with the family history of the Butlers, one of whom , tradition says, actually built a residence in the nave of the church and was thereafter commonly referred to as “Mr. Piers Butler of the

Abbey." They in turn leave the scene because they supported the ill-fated James II.

The last Butler to possess Duiske was Piers Butler, Third Lord Galmoy, and, although many of his kinsmen likewise supported King James, e.g., Mountgarret, Dunboyne, and Cahir, all were restored at one period or another except Galmoy. This Piers Butler raised on his own property here a regiment of horse, which became known as "Galmoy's Horse," and fought with distinction at the Boyne, Aughrim and Limerick, but rather than take the Oath of Supremacy, he flew with the "Wild Geese" and reformed his "Galmoy Regiment" in France, where he rose to the rank of Lieutenant General. He died without issue in 1740.

Previously in 1703, 'Duiske Abbey' and considerable portion of the Galmoy Estates were sold and later passed to the Clifden family from whom the property was leased for ever to the people at a nominal rent just 100 years later.

The octagonal Tower fell in 1774 and, no doubt, brought with it many of the Archways in the Nave, and this now is how John Bernard Trotter described the ruins when he visited them in 1812: "I cannot describe how nobly venerable it looked. I do not except the celebrated Abbey of Tintern in Monmouthshire when I say that nothing could be found more venerable and beautifully interesting in the empire than Graignamanagh Abbey."

The Church was in ruins and until 1728 when the "Mass House" was erected against the walls of the South Transept and Scriptorium, Mass was offered in the Conventual buildings where for a period a penal altar served the needs of the people. Anthony Forrestal was parish priest in 1704. He had studied in Spain and was ordained there in 1676. Father Robert Rossiter succeeded him in 1731. The visitor to the parish church today may read the names of the priests who led the people of Graignamanagh from penal oppression to the dawn of Emancipation. Here also in the vestry is part of the "penal altar" transferred from the "Mass House" when that building was no longer required.

Fr. Lewis Moore and the '98 patriot, General Cloney, guided the movement to restore the Abbey Church. The roofing over of the greater part of the ruined building, the erec-

tion of galleries and the transition to Parish Church status were completed in 1813. More than a generation later in 1886 the West End was restored and roofed. The damaged arches were repaired and joined to the gable of the present Church rendering it in length, at least, the same as it was seven centuries ago. The present bell was installed the following year and this event caused much rejoicing when its mellow tones first echoed over the Valley at Christmas 1887.

The Church railings, an example of local craftsmanship and co-operation, were designed, modelled, cast and erected entirely by Graignamanagh men, replacing the thatched houses then at the base of the church. The present Bapistry was added in 1916 following discovery of the ornate Processional Door. Here on the original level are assembled and preserved many of the ancient floor tiles of the Abbey.

One hundred and fifty years have passed and this generation, like others before it, wishes to preserve and embellish their centuries old heritage. Every street has a relic of history and historians love to trace the saga of the Cistercians of Duiske. Listen to one eminent writer, Mr. Sean O'Faolain: — "This village was far from clustering for shelter under the protecting wings of the old Abbey—said by one traveller to have been, even in its ruin, as beautiful as Tintern. It has, in the most amazing, terrifying and thorough fashion, crept over the Abbey stock and stone, built garage and pub and warehouse and shop and bakeries and police barracks on top of it and with its fallen stones; so that today this memorial of Norman civilisation lies like a drowned glory beneath an Irish village and no traveller would notice anything, until by halting for a few days he would gradually become aware of an aura not of our times. Searching, then, he will come upon the poor stones from which it emanates; and searching deeper, find the Norman spirit still powerful in the nature of the people about and in their husbandry of the land". In this way the people of the time took over the remains of their beloved Abbey, attended Mass, buried their dead within and without its ruined walls and thus later successfully claimed the right to possess the ruins when the period of persecution had passed.

Parishioners have a personal pride in their unique Church where God has been glorified without a break since Norman

times. To some extent at least, this can be attributed to the promise contained in the foundation charter of the Abbey:—“He who injures this house incurs God’s malediction and mine; but may he who preserves it obtain with God’s blessing and mine an Eternal reward”.

*Note :* This year these words have a more than passing interest not only to all Graignamanagh folk scattered throughout the world but also to all who cherish our past traditions and history. Solemn High Mass celebrated by Very Rev. W. Gavin, P.P. under the last remaining arch of the Chancel opened a week to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the 1813 Restoration. Many with Graignamanagh connections returned to participate and hear a special sermon preached by Monsignor Miller, P.P., Newbridge, distinguished historian and author. To honour the occasion the town was gaily decorated. Flood lighting at night illuminated the building whilst on display within were the Butler Chalice used at the Commemorative Mass, the Captain Casey Cross and the original reredos of the “Penal Altar.” Regretfully, the great and unique Church has not escaped the ravages of time. Extensive and costly repairs are urgent. Already as in previous generations parishioners have rallied to the call and seek the practical goodwill of all lovers of our ancient past. Is it wishful thinking to hope that the fund raising appeal launched in this historic year will make possible a full and complete restoration along original lines. We owe it to past generations now slumbering within and without these ancient walls. Let us sincerely hope we are not found wanting.

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### WEBBSBOROUGH

To be let from March next during the minority of Arthur Webb (now 12 years) the house and demesne of Webbsborough, containing about 100 acres — the house and offices are very convenient and very fit for the immediate reception of a gentleman. The lands are well divided, sheltered and watered, mainly all meadowing and situated in a fine sporting country. Great plenty of game on the demesne and on the several estates belonging to the minority which be very contiguous — Proposals to Mrs. Webb, 11 Gloster Street, Dublin. —Finn’s Leinster Journal (November 16, 1786).